

I am a RID certified sign language interpreter and have recently started working in the VRS environment. Video relay Service is a much needed and desired service. There is no question that it provides functional equivalence for members of the Deaf community for telecommunications needs. However, I am concerned that the demands placed on the interpreting community are detrimental to both interpreters and the Deaf community. Currently, in many areas there are not enough interpreters to cover community interpreting needs. With new VRS call centers opening, many community interpreters will be drawn out of the community and into VRS, leaving a lack of interpreting coverage for day to day needs (ranging from education to medical to corporate). Deaf consumers with non VRS related interpreting needs could suffer as a result of this. Also, having the service be 24/7 will require many interpreters. I am not sure the current number of qualified interpreters nation wide is enough to handle this demand while still providing a high level of quality to the consumer and not adversely affecting the health of interpreters. Deaf consumers deserve the highest level of quality and qualification in interpreters. Overwork could lead to injury and attrition from the field of interpreting, thus reducing the amount of qualified interpreters remaining for any interpreting needs (VRS, community and educational). Requiring 24/7 coverage could lead to the hiring of less than qualified interpreters to meet the needs, while adversely affecting the service Deaf consumers receive. Please look carefully at the demands that will be placed on interpreters in VRS and how they not only affect the interpreters but the Deaf community as well.